



March 2018

STEM Lab in the Making for Lower School Students

Becky Callaway
Lower School Principal

STEM is an acronym that has become a buzzword in educational circles in recent years. The term references “science, technology, engineering, and math,” with the lion’s share of emphasis given to science. To the best of their ability with decreasing budgets and altered schedules designed to devote more and more time to preparation for high stakes testing, many of Georgia’s government schools have sought to divert funding where possible to the STEM movement. This has fueled the expectation of discriminating stakeholders that “good schools” show that they have fresh, viable course offerings for students in as many of the four branches of STEM as possible. But what are the implications of movements like STEM for schools like Prince?

Two years ago, Academic Dean Kendall Eley and I began discussing how we could augment the study of science in our lower school curriculum to give it a more viable presence. One primary purpose for academic studies with young children is to whet their appetite for continued exploration in the various academic disciplines, setting the stage for them to become life-long learners. Science can captivate students’



attention and interest possibly better than any other of the academic disciplines IF the topics to be studied are presented effectively. For us, we knew this needed to mean increased exposure for students with

“hands-on” learning experiences. Agreeing that this would be a long-term curricular goal for us, I was able to visit a school similar to ours in metropolitan Atlanta whose science program had, in their words, become a drawing card for new

families. It was at that point that Dean Eley and I agreed that bringing fundamental changes to our science instruction in the early grades would be a serious focus.

Last spring I was privileged to meet with some of our lower school parents to share our vision and solicit their involvement in what we knew would be a slow process, due to budgetary constraints.

The results of that meeting were more uniform topical studies across the lower school grade levels, regularly scheduled hands-on activities to complement the textbook units of study at each grade level, AND a room we have designated as the lower school science “lab!”



The hands-on activities in which students have engaged are voluntarily planned and implemented monthly by Dr. Amy Shiver, a Prince parent and licensed veterinarian. If you have lower school students, you know how popular Dr. Shiver and her “labs” have been!

In January, we saw our efforts and the vision for our STEM program advance by giant steps with the award of a grant of over \$4000 from Walton EMC. With these funds we have been able to stock our new lab with equipment like microscopes, models and supplies for the activities Dr. Shiver has planned for the students. (Be on the lookout over the next few weeks for the beginnings of our new school garden—one of the projects funded with our grant money!) While our grant funds have given momentum to our vision for our science program, we see this addition as only the beginning for us.

Dean Eley, Colonel Hathaway, and I are currently in discussion about the next stages of development we envision for this area of our lower school curriculum. We look forward to building upon the foundation we’ve been able to lay this year through parental and community support, and we welcome your participation and partnership along the way.